

Training for Rural Nurses and Midwives Designed to Improve Maternal and Newborn Health Care



In July 2002, the PRIME II Project crossed an important threshold in efforts to improve Armenian maternal and newborn health care. A curriculum development working group met for three days in Yerevan, the capital city of Armenia where PRIME has established its office. The group came together to design a six-to-eight month program blending traditional classroom experiences with on-the-job and distance learning approaches in maternal and newborn health for 60 nurses and midwives working in primary care settings in rural Lori Marz province.

The Vital Role of Nurses in Rural Health Care

Health care service delivery in Armenia, as in other countries of the former Soviet Union, is characterized by a superabundance of specialist physicians, particularly in urban areas and small towns. The role of nurses has been limited in scope and they often lack competence in providing basic primary care services. Yet in rural areas nurses are often the only source of health care. PRIME's program in Lori Marz will strengthen the knowledge and skills of nurses and midwives working in rural health posts and ambulatory care facilities. Topics include prenatal care, emergency obstetrics, and postpartum and newborn care for the first four months after birth.

A Blended Learning Approach

The curriculum development working group, facilitated by PRIME II technical staff, brought together primary providers from Lori Marz, representatives from the national reproductive health training team and several nursing schools, and family medicine and nursing faculty. The newly designed training program relies on a combination of classroom instruction, clinical practice, self-study exercises, peer-group learning and mentoring. As part of the program, rural health

PRIME II Country Office for Armenia
31 Moskovyan Street
Apartment 76A
Yerevan, Armenia
Tel: 374-153-2697
prime@arminco.com

PRIME II

Intrah School of Medicine
University of North Carolina
1700 Airport Road, Suite 300 CB 8100
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-8100
Tel: 919-966-5636 Fax: 919-966-6816
intrah@intrah.org www.prime2.org

care facilities in Lori Marz will receive basic equipment and supply kits from USAID to ensure that trained providers will be able to apply their newly acquired skills on the job. The curriculum will be fully developed and the learner support system reinforced over the next several months, with the training and learning program scheduled to begin with facilitator and learner orientations in November 2002.

PRIME's Mission in Armenia

USAID/Armenia invited PRIME II to Yerevan in 2001 to provide technical assistance in health sector reform, with an emphasis on primary and preventive reproductive health care at the local level. A performance needs assessment, conducted in August 2001, led to the development of a project strategy and workplan. The two-year project centers around three goals:

- Strengthening the policy framework for expanded accessibility and quality of reproductive health care
- Reinforcing reproductive health training curriculum for a new cadre of family medicine practitioners
- Improving the performance of rural doctors, nurses and midwives in meeting the reproductive health needs of clients.

As part of this mandate, PRIME has been assisting senior Ministry of Health (MOH) staff in establishing the foundation for refined national reproductive health care policies and standards. Enabled by recently passed legislation, an MOH working group facilitated by PRIME is charged with developing a full set of reproductive health policies over the next 15 to 18 months. These policies will complement a national initiative to introduce family medicine practitioners as a more efficient means of providing general, primary health care than the Soviet-era system of specialized physicians. PRIME is examining computer-based self-directed learning modules as a means of providing innovative problem-centered case studies to help family medicine doctors at a tertiary-level hospital in Yerevan learn new reproductive health skills.

Better reproductive health care to benefit all Armenians is the ultimate goal of PRIME II's technical assistance, which improves the accessibility and quality of services through policy development and innovative pre- and in-service training and learning strategies.



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